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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

December 7, 1977

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 1/24/83

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Honorable Cyrus Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you probably know, the 1967 [illegible] attack on the USS Liberty has again come into focus with the recent release of some CIA documents under the Freedom of Information Act. The papers raise interesting questions about the government's handling of the situation and even more serious, questions as to whether or not the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty was deliberate.

It has come to my attention through correspondence which was recently received in my office that the Department of State compensated with money from the Israeli government the families of crew members who died in the attack and those who were wounded at the same time. According to the State Department's Legal Advisor's office at the time the claims were settled, the government of Israel paid money directly to the Department which then compensated the families and the victims in amounts ranging from $200 to $349,000.

This arrangement brings up two important questions in light of the facts which are in dispute concerning the Liberty attack. First, is it not very unusual for a foreign government to pay damages for an attack on a foreign vessel in a time of war? And secondly, did the Department of State approach the Israeli government for compensation or did Israel offer on its own to pay the victims and their families?

I would appreciate any information you can provide to clarify these two questions and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

James Abourezk
United States Senate

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